

watches

Words BANI MCSPELLEN Photography ARUNAS

water babies: watches to dive for

Designed for the depths, dive watches now make their biggest splash in the boardroom.

Over the eons, of all the equipment invented to assist man's conquest of the deep, who'd have thought that one piece would become a veritable fashion item in the 21st century? The diving watch, a timepiece supposedly designed for the singular pursuits of the scuba crowd, is increasingly seen decorating the wrists of the landlubber.

What makes the longevity of the diving watch even more surprising is that today's professional divers probably don't wear one at all, relying instead on wrist-mounted dive computers in which electronics and liquid crystal displays have long replaced springs, cogs and anything that ticks.

This hasn't stopped watch manufacturers from the valleys of Switzerland to the shadows of Mount Fuji cooking up new and more fantastic mechanical models each year for their macho male constituency. This enthusiast likes to have on his wrist something large, waterproof, bulletproof, handsome, legible and preferably with a bezel or buttons to do stuff with.

On all these points the dive watch scores big. You clamp it on, leave it on no matter what and just rinse it under the tap when it gets grubby. The bezel, once necessary >

ZENO CANTEEN

Frogmen and naval divers wore watches with a giant canister-like cover sealing the vulnerable area around the winder. Early Hamilton and Elgin models were issued to the US Navy. This Zeno Canteen watch with Unitas hand-wind movement has become a collector's item.

Chanel J12

Unique thanks to its scratch-proof ceramic case and bracelet, the J12 with automatic mechanical movement sees the fashion brand explore completely new territory. Rated to 200m. **\$5100**

Baume & Mercier Capeland S XXL 1000m

A titanium case and yellow dial made from Kevlar fibres sets this 1000m-rated watch apart. Band adjusts to fit over diving suit. **\$3800**

Citizen 1000m Professional Diver

With hardened titanium case, detachable bezel for cleaning and 6mm sapphire crystal face, this watch is designed for saturation diving. **\$2999**

watches

Rolex Submariner

Encased in stainless steel and sapphire crystal glass, the Submariner is capable of doing the job in any environment. Rated to 300m. **\$6780**

to mark how much air was left in the tanks, is now a handy bonus for gauging when the parking meter is critical. Dive watches were the first to feature a bright orange or yellow dial, another once purely practical feature now appropriated by the fashion crowd.

A few names feature prominently in the development of the breed, none more so than Rolex. The company has a gift for building unusually robust timepieces and also garnering publicity for them at crucial times. Whether it was Hillary and Tenzing climbing Everest or someone diving to unheard of depths, a Rolex always seemed to be there. So it was for their first attempts at a record-breaking underwater watch.

In 1960 they sent their deep-sea Oyster prototype down almost 11,000m, lashed to the outside of Jacques Piccard's bathyscaphe. This watch had a magnifying glass type lens and was the inspiration for the Corum "bubble" watches.

Behind all this there was real achievement stretching back to the 1920s, when Rolex virtually invented the water-resistant watch, and patented the name Oyster, which became synonymous with watches boasting a screw-in case back, replacing the previous snap-on backs.

To publicise the Oyster, Mercedes Gleitze wore one for an English Channel swim in 1927. Subsequent advertising proclaimed "More than 10 hours submersion under the most trying conditions failed to harm its perfect timekeeping. No moisture had penetrated and not the slightest >

IWC Aquatimer

The Aquatimer is rated to 1000 metres and comes with highlights in white or yellow on the minute hand and under-glass bezel. A black rubber strap with safety clasp completes the picture. **\$5690**



watches

Breitling Super Ocean

Developed in the 1950s, the Super Ocean features thick glare-proof glass. Water-resistant to 1500m. **\$3030**

corrosion or condensation was revealed.” However, while no other watch was truly water-resistant, the need for such an attribute went largely unrecognised by the public.

Although production of water-resistant watches increased during WWII, sales were slow until the 1950s, when Jacques Cousteau’s film *The Silent World* (1956) and the TV series *Sea Hunt* (1958-61) gave diving widespread publicity. In 1954 Rolex introduced the Submariner, the watch that virtually launched a category. Rolex soon had a modern hero to take the Submariner beyond the skindiving community. His name was Bond, James Bond. >

Bulgari Diagono Acqua

Capable of telling the time accurately at 2000m, the Bulgari is a certified chronometer, complete with helium escape valve to protect the watch during ascent. **\$6350**

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DIVE TIME

Like sands through the hourglass, but far more efficient underwater – the dive time pioneers.

In 1896 patents were taken out for sealing watches for underwater use. In 1927 Rolex introduced the Oyster (1930s model pictured).

1932 saw the Omega Marine, 1938 the Panerai Radiomir and by 1943 underwater demolition teams were wearing Canteen watches from Hamilton, Elgin and Waltham. Many recreational models emerged in the 1950s and '60s. The '60s also brought the Seiko Pro series, IWC's Aquatimer and Doxa's Sub 300. Big brands in the 1970s were Omega, Rolex and Seiko, then Tag Heuer in the '80s. By the '90s the traditional Swiss brands were conceding territory to Seiko and Citizen. The 21st century has seen renewed interest in high-end mechanical models.





Tissot Seastar 660

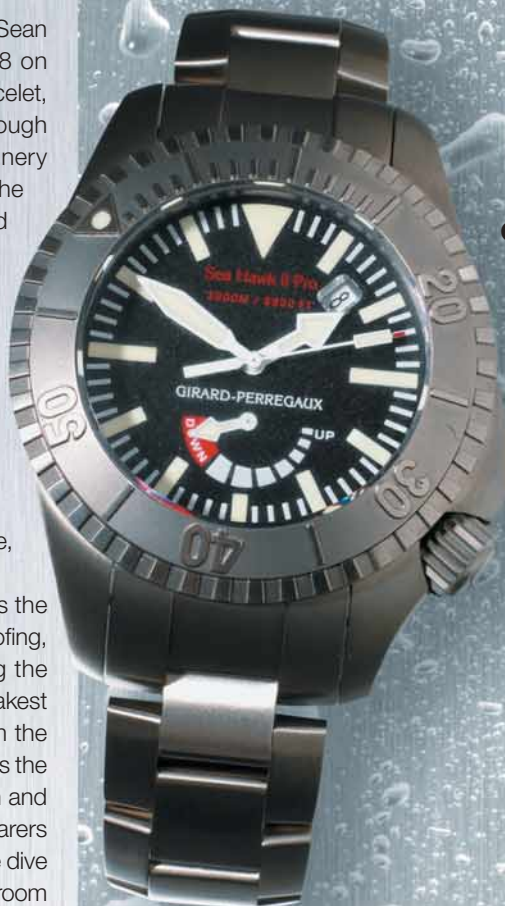
The Seastar family is a famous one; this model, with its safety clasp with diver's extension, can descend to 300m. **\$495**

The first Bond film, *Dr No* (1962) had Sean Connery sporting a Submariner 6538 on his wrist. Instead of the usual metal bracelet, it was mounted on a fabric thread-through NATO band. The striped version Connery wore is still called the Bond band and the 6538 is commonly labelled the Bond Submariner. Although superseded, it is a highly sought-after and highly priced collectable, with experts citing build quality, reliability, status, and resale value. To that, add appearance: Rolex's handsome dive models don't date. The look has changed remarkably little over the last 40 years and even older models appear contemporary. But in terms of underwater performance, they are a different animal.

It took later Rolex inventions such as the Triplock crown to provide true waterproofing, as distinct from resistance, by solving the problem of moisture getting in at the weakest point – the winder. Taking a lead from the screw-in back, the Triplock crown allows the winder to be screwed in, locked down and sealed with tiny gaskets. To many wearers this was academic; thanks to Bond, the dive watch was equally at home in the boardroom as on the reef.

If Rolex was the first fish in the ocean, it is by no means the only one. Omega has done as much to popularise underwater models as any brand – its Seamaster range dates back to the 1940s. Omega has been the holder of the James Bond franchise ▶

**Panerai 2500
Submersible**
Nicknamed La Bomba, this limited-edition monster of the deep measures 47mm across, comes in titanium to reduce the weight and is rated to 2500m. **\$13,000**



Girard-Perregaux Sea Hawk II

With its unusual case shape and broad hands, the self-winding Sea Hawk – the name dates to 1959 – makes a big statement. Rated to 3000m. **\$8600 to \$14,946**

Omega Planet Ocean
Latest in the venerable Seamaster line, the Planet Ocean is rated at 600m and comes with a revolutionary coaxial movement that dramatically cuts wear and tear. **\$4800 (on bracelet)**



watches



Bell & Ross Hydromax

The only watch designed to go to an incredible 11,100m. To hold things together at this depth the entire case is filled with a transparent oil-like substance and has a flexible rubber back. **\$4975**

Corum Bubble

So called because of its magnifying-glass-like crystal, designer Severin Wunderman took his inspiration from the 1960 Rolex watch that descended with Piccard's bathyscaphe. Good for 200m. **\$6750**

Tag Heuer Aquaracer 2000

Developed with world free-diving champion Tanya Streeter. It goes to 300m and looks the part for **\$1350**

Blancpain Fifty Fathoms

Enjoy the same dial design and oversized luminous markers as the original 1953 Fifty Fathoms, the major change being in size – now 40mm – and depth rating of 300m. **\$11,800**

since Pierce Brosnan's arrival as a Seamaster-wearing Bond in *GoldenEye* (1995). Omega's most collectable model is the heavy 1973 Ploprof, a massive hunk of steel capable of descending to 600m, while the mid-1990s Seamaster Professional range introduced the first chronograph capable of being operated under water.

The most expensive dive watch ever produced is IWC's Deep One. Its development absorbed hundreds of thousands of dollars thanks to the incorporation of a mechanical depth gauge. Released in 1999, production of the Deep One was halted after just 1000 units; the price, about \$17,000, didn't cover the cost. Prior to this, IWC's iconic model was the 1982 Porsche Design Ocean 2000.

Seiko has produced more dive models than any brand, for both serious diver and dilettante. At the serious end, Seiko pioneered the use of titanium,

ideal for its corrosion-resistant qualities. The 600m Pro Diver, launched in 1975, was the world's first titanium watch to go into production. Today, Seiko's highly complex professional dive tools are the choice of saturation divers worldwide. At the other end of the scale, Seiko produces models for whatever you want to do – from looking good to taking a dip. 

